

Michael F. Easley
Governor



State of North Carolina
Office of the Governor

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GOV. EASLEY SIGNS BILL BROADENING INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR MENTAL HEALTH
New Law Puts Mental Health Coverage On Par With Coverage For Physical Illnesses

RALEIGH – Gov. Mike Easley today announced he has signed into law House Bill 973, “An act to require mandatory health insurance coverage of certain mental illnesses and to require at least a minimum benefit package for other mental illnesses.” This new law requires insurance companies to cover mental illness in the same way they cover treatment for physical illness.

“This legislation ends what has effectively been a form of discrimination in the health insurance coverage of those with mental illness,” Easley said. “Requiring insurers to provide the same coverage for co-payments, doctors visits and hospitalization means patients will be treated fairly, whether being seen for physical or mental illnesses.”

Currently, health insurance policies can have different co-payments and other areas of coverage for mental illness than physical illness. Often, the fees are greater for mental health treatment. The legislation requires that full parity with physical illnesses be extended to major mental health conditions including: bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder, anorexia nervosa, bulimia, schizophrenia, paranoia, post-traumatic stress disorder and obsessive compulsive disorder.

“Today is an historic day for the citizens of North Carolina,” said state Rep. Martha Alexander (D-Mecklenburg), the bill’s primary sponsor. “For too many years we have been unfair to those with mental illness and now these patients will be treated on par with other patients and not discriminated against.”

Other sponsors of the bill include Rep. Hugh Holliman (D-Davidson), Rep. William Wainwright (D-Craven) and Rep. Verla Insko (D-Orange.) The bill was carried in the state Senate by Sen. Martin Nesbitt (D-Buncombe).

The act becomes effective July 1, 2008. The legislation passed the House of Representatives 116-1 and was approved in the Senate on a 36-12 vote.

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(For a photo of HB 973 being signed, contact the Press Office at 919.733.5612).